

Article

# “People of Freedom and Unlimited Movement”: Representations of Roma in Post-Communist Memorial Museums

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## Abstract

The “universalization of the Holocaust” and the insistence on Roma rights as an EU accession criteria have changed the memory of the Roma genocide in post-communist countries. This article examines how Roma are represented in post-communist memorial museums which wanted to prove that they correspond with “European memory standards”. The three case studies discussed here are the *Museum of the Slovak National Uprising*, the *Jasenovac Memorial Museum* and the *Holocaust Memorial Center* in Budapest. I argue that today Roma are being represented for the first time, but in a stereotypical way and through less prominent means in exhibitions which lack individualizing elements like testimonies, photographs from their life before the persecution or artifacts. This can only partially be explained by the (relative) unavailability of data that is often deplored by researchers of the Roma genocide.

## Keywords

Europeanization; memorial museums; Roma genocide; World War II

## Issue

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## 1. Introduction

When I was discussing an earlier version of this article with my colleagues—who are well aware of the pogrom-like attacks that cost the lives of many Roma in post-communist countries in the 1990s and the constant threats anti-Gypsism poses for Roma today, but do not read scholarly texts about Roma on a regular basis—they were glad to find out that there is a word for the mass murder of Roma by the Nazis and their collaborators: Porrajmos. But when they figured out that Ian Hancock, who coined the term, understands it as a “word for the Romani Holocaust” (2006), the need to equalize the two “final solutions” instead of scrutinizing both as historically precisely as possible, disappointed them. Since Roma do not have their own state to support their interests and there is no established term for the mass murder committed against Roma

during World War II, confronting these historical events still seems as difficult as overcoming today’s anti-Gypsism—or seeing the continuities between the two by that matter.

This article is part of a larger project on state-funded post-communist memorial museums that concentrates primarily on the World War II period, focusing on the impact of EU enlargement negotiations on these new exhibitions. I argue that the understanding of the Holocaust as *the* negative icon of our era has led to the establishment of it as a founding myth of Europe. So how are Roma represented in permanent exhibitions opened in the last fifteen years? How have the “Europeanization of memory” and the insistence on Roma rights as an EU accession criteria influenced the memory of the so-called “Roma Holocaust” in post-communist countries?

Obviously, not all post-communist memorial muse-

ums deal with the history of the Roma. Although the *Terezín Memorial* in the Czech Republic for example cooperates with the *Museum of Romani Culture* in Brno when it comes to Holocaust Education and teachers' training (Munk, 2007, p. 40), the extermination of the Czechoslovak Roma is only mentioned in two sentences throughout the exhibition's guidebook (Blodig, Langhamerová, & Vajskebr, 2009, p. 15; 76). This can be explained by the fact that only very few Roma were interned in Terezín. But the absence of a state memorial museum in Lety—on the ground of what is today a pig farm and was formerly a Roma concentration camp—already tells us a lot about the representation of Roma in the Czech Republic.<sup>1</sup> This article focuses on those state post-communist memorial museums that have included the persecution of the Roma in World War II in their permanent exhibitions most extensively. I have chosen three exhibitions—one from 2004 and two from 2006—that must be seen in the context of the “universalization” and “Europeanization of the Holocaust” since they claim that their exhibitions fulfill “European standards” and/or their aesthetics and the focus on the individual victim clearly refer to archetypical Holocaust museums, most of all the *US Holocaust Memorial Museum* in Washington, D.C., as I will show later on.

Although all three museums deal with phenomena from the World War II period, the scope of their exhibitions is different. The *Museum of the Slovak National Uprising* focuses on one particular event (in 1944) in which Roma took part alongside others and which led to deadly racial persecutions of Jews and Roma. The *Jasenovac Memorial Museum* in Croatia is *in situ*—at the site of a former Ustaša concentration camp where Roma were the second largest victim group.<sup>2</sup> The *Holocaust Memorial Center* in Budapest is dedicated to the mass murder of Jews and Roma from an entire country—Hungary.

The fact that these museums have included Roma in the first place can only be understood in the context of the “Europeanization of the Roma Genocide”. Furthermore, I will show that the way Roma are represented in those three institutions has more to do with the tradition of depicting Roma as the alien “Other” than with the national contexts of the museums. After discussing current trends of the “universalization of the Holocaust” and the “Europeanization of the Roma genocide”, I compare how Roma are represented in the permanent exhibitions, the commemorative parts of

the museums and in the guide books. Of course not all elements of an exhibition are equally visible; text panels are far more prominent than info-screens with thousands of “pages” of information. Visual representations and personal stories of individuals call for more empathy than bare numbers or photographs of anonymous corpses—so it is particularly interesting to see not only how, but also where Roma are included. The fact that the *Jasenovac Memorial Museum* and the *Museum of the Slovak National Uprising* were inaugurated already in the 1960s allows us to scrutinize the research question in a diachronic perspective as well comparing the current permanent exhibitions and museum guidebooks with previous ones.

## 2. From “Universalization of the Holocaust” to “Europeanization of the Roma Genocide”

The “memory-boom” in the West after the Cold War emphasized the Holocaust as a “negative icon” (Diner, 2007, p. 7) of the twentieth century. It has become a universal imperative for the respect of human rights in general and a “container” for the memory of different victims and victim groups (Levy & Sznajder, 2005). Yet, Roma, Poles, and homosexuals were often referred to as “other victims” (Hancock, 2006, p. 53).<sup>3</sup> In the EU, this “universalization of the Holocaust” includes another dimension: the Holocaust has been addressed as a “negative European founding myth” (Leggewie & Lang, 2011, p. 15) by EU politicians and scholars (Judit, 2005): Post-war Europe is understood as a collective that developed shared structures in order to avoid a recurrence of the catastrophe of the Holocaust. In its search for an identity that goes beyond economic and monetary union, this founding myth provides a compelling common narrative that is otherwise lacking. The suggestion that countries join the *Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research* (today *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*—IHRA) and implement a Holocaust Memorial Day was the first step towards some kind of “European standard”. While not officially applied during the eastern enlargement of the EU in 2004, these standards were internalized by the future

1 In 2010, a tiny exhibition in a replica of a barrack next to the pig farm has been installed by the staff of the Lidice memorial.

2 The list of Jasenovac victims is not complete, but shows the dimensions: 47627 Serbs, 16173 Roma, 13116 Jews, 4255 Croats, 1128 Muslims and 846 other victims have been identified by name by the Jasenovac memorial site (List of Individual Victims of Jasenovac Concentration Camp, n.d.).

3 The dominance of the “negative icon” Holocaust becomes evident in the long and highly politicized debate about the term “Roma Holocaust”: While Hancock (2006) on the one hand insists on the parallel between the two “final solutions” and Lewy (2000) on the other hand denies that even the terms “genocide” or “mass murder” can be applied to the crimes committed against Roma in Auschwitz, Margalit (2002) partially follows Lewy's argument, but still in 2006 he names parallels between the “Holocaust” and the “genocide”: “The genocide of the gypsies was carried out by the Nazi regime, sometimes in the same places and by the same murderers who perpetrated the Holocaust” (Aderet, 2012).

member countries—as suggested by the fact that Hungary’s *Holocaust Memorial Centre* opened a few weeks before the country joined the EU—despite no permanent exhibition having been installed at that point.

One result of the “universalization of the Holocaust” has been the growing attention for the Roma genocide, both on a scholarly level and “for Roma organizations and for individual Romanies” (Kapralski, 1997, p. 276). In 1994 Roma from all over the world gathered in Auschwitz to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the elimination of the so-called Gypsy camp (*Zigeunerlager*), and the Roma Association in Poland set up their headquarters in Oswiecim—a claim “to participation in the symbolic meaning of Auschwitz” (Kapralski, 1997, p. 277). In the new millennium the Council of Europe and the EU have increasingly stressed the importance of remembering the Roma genocide. In 2005 the European Parliament (EP) passed a groundbreaking resolution in which it argued that “the Romani Holocaust deserves full recognition, commensurate with the gravity of Nazi crimes designed to physically eliminate the Roma of Europe, and calling in this connection on the Commission and the authorities to take all necessary steps to remove the pig farm from the site of the former concentration camp at Lety u Pisku and to create a suitable memorial” (European Parliament, 2005a; see also van Baar, 2008, p. 382). The Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights stressed that “the importance of teaching about Roma history cannot be overemphasised. Teaching about Roma history, raising awareness of the Roma genocide during the Second World War, and building and maintaining memorial sites are the least states could do to honour Roma victims.” (Hammarberg, 2011; Thornton, 2014, p. 111-112) Another EP resolution from 2005(b) not only “pays homage to all the victims of the Nazis”—Roma are explicitly mentioned—, but also links remembrance in general directly to the current situation (“attacks on minority groups including Roma”) when arguing that “lasting peace in Europe must be based on remembrance of its history”. Van Baar (2008, p. 382) argues that “the reason why the EU’s mobilisation of Holocaust remembrance for integrative aims also affects the Roma has to do with another, more general and widespread tendency to Europeanise the representation of the Roma.”<sup>4</sup>

4 Yet, this development is an ambivalent one. On the one hand, the European Commission is aware of the “pitfalls” that come with a “declaratory ‘Europeanisation’” of the question of Roma inclusion, as a working document from 2008 puts it, since it could “symbolically transfer the responsibility to European institutions without providing them with new instruments to deal with it and without sufficient commitments from Member States” (Vermeersch, 2012, p. 1204). Despite this awareness of the potential dangers of “Europeanizing the Roma”, the EU is, on the other hand, “unable to prevent other ac-

Interestingly enough, some authors argue against these efforts, claiming that the “EU’s deployment of Romani Holocaust remembrance may be particularly dangerous because its mobilisation for integrative aims could suggest that the Roma have ‘always’ lived in isolation and that their far-reaching socioeconomic and cultural segregation under Nazism was not the effect but the cause of their persecution” (van Baar, 2008, p. 384). Crowe, on the other hand, stresses that while it is true that “so much needs to be done to address the contemporary problems of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe”, knowledge about the Roma genocide is important: “The reason is the powerful link between the Roma past and present. For those of us who work to find solutions to the contemporary difficulties faced by the Roma in Europe, it is always shocking to find out how little politicians and others charged with helping solve some of these issues know about the Roma past” (Crowe, 2002, p. 84-85).

Even if state memorial museums are inaugurated in order to signalize readiness for “Europe” in an atmosphere without direct political pressure by the EU, but in which “the case for enlargement was articulated in terms of common values” (Varmersch, 2012, p. 1198), they are institutions that can contribute to this knowledge of the long neglected Roma genocide. They not only display history, but also include a commemorative aspect since they deal with traumatic events of the recent past. Museums are key-producers of knowledge and history; they display how a society interprets its past, but they are definitely not neutral spaces of knowledge transfer showing how “it” was before. They are rather manifestations of cultural patterns, inclusion and exclusion mechanisms as well as social, ethnic and religious in- and outgroups—contested spaces (Sommer-Sieghart, 2006, p. 159). Memorial museums are sites where identity is represented, official memory is canonized, and the dominant historical narrative is made visible as the fundament of the present. Yet, museums can also challenge the hegemonic national narrative. In both cases, decisions concerning which objects and images should be used, how to organize them, and how to choose a space in which to display them involve aesthetic and ethical issues typically loaded with significance. Sarkisova and Apor (2008, p. 5) argue that physical objects play a significant role in the relationship of the present to the recent past, which is why the “‘touch of the real’ makes historical exhibitions so attractive for many variants of the politics of history and memory.” Recent decades

tors from reading its actions as a form of Europeanization” (Vermeersch, 2012, p. 1204) which provides “new discursive material for nationalist politicians with an anti-Romani agenda who try to minimize or evade their countries’ domestic responsibility by highlighting the role and responsibility of the EU” (p. 1194).

have also witnessed a change in perspective. What was formulated as a desiderate fifteen years ago (Crane, 1997, p. 63) now goes without saying that the focus on the victims' perspective has for the most part replaced hero, martyr or resistance narratives. (Rousso, 2011, p. 32) Still, we need to distinguish between the individual approach that aims at displaying "ordinary life before" (Köhr, 2007) and empathy without identification on the one hand, and the victim represented as part of a collective, as an emotionalizing symbol for national suffering on the other hand.

When it comes to representing ethnic minorities, the exhibitions analyzed in this article fight the marginalization of Roma and the history of their persecution in their respective societies. But they might also "reduce complex histories of cultural and ethnic identification processes" to simplified portrayal of Roma "as unchanging, historically enduring cultural and ethnic subjects, unaffected by social processes such as interaction, internal contestation, interpretation and categorisation" (Vermeersch, 2008, p. 261). Representations of the Roma as a clearly delineable whole "are well intentioned and carry an emancipatory message that fits in with the minority recognition model that advocacy groups and governmental bodies seek to promote" (ibid.), but negative implications of such politicization should be taken into account. The three case studies will show how this challenge is confronted in the museums.

### 3. Museum of the Slovak National Uprising

The Slovak National Uprising (SNU) was an armed insurrection against the Nazis and their Slovak collaborators organized by the Slovak resistance movement during World War II. It was launched on 29 August 1944 in Banská Bystrica in Central Slovakia and defeated in October. In retaliation, Einsatzgruppen together with Slovak collaborationists destroyed 93 villages and executed many Slovaks suspected of aiding the rebels as well as Roma and Jews who had avoided deportation until then (Kamenec, 2007). The largest executions took place in Kremnička (747 killed, mostly Jews and Roma) and Nemecká (900 killed). The architectonically impressive and monumental building that houses the museum today was inaugurated in Banská Bystrica in 1969. In the 1960s, the Holocaust of the Slovak Jews was mentioned in the exhibition for the first time—at least for three months during 1969. However, in the 1970s, repressive "normalization" politics denounced the earlier reforms in the context of the Prague spring as Zionist attacks against the communist regime (Sniegón, 2008). The Holocaust was permanently "added" to the exhibition in 1998, but it was dealt with in a section titled "Persecution of Opposition" and thus misinterpreted as a consequence of Jewish resistance (Slovak National Uprising Museum, 2000, p. 14).

Roma are not mentioned in the guide books from 1977, 1985 or 1990, only in the two most recent ones from 2000 and 2006—a result of the "universalization of the Holocaust" and the "Europeanization of Memory". In 1977 for example, Nemecká und Kremnička are mentioned as sites of "the cruelest fascist crimes in Slovakia" (Múzeum SNP, 1977, p. 53), but, adhering to the socialist narrative, the information that most of the victims were Jews and Roma is left out. The first time "Gypsies" are mentioned is in 2000: "As part of the state persecution special military labour camps were founded for non-Aryan citizens....In the camps Jews, Gypsies, socially discriminate people—non-Aryans—were placed, having been deprived of all citizen and human rights" (Slovak National Uprising Museum, 2000, p. 15; see also Kamenec, 2007, pp. 314-326).

The current exhibition was developed in 2004, the year Slovakia joined the EU. "The SNU is no longer presented as an isolated historical event...but in a European historical context" as an "inseparable part of the European history". (Lášticová & Findor, 2008, p. 237) Already in 2000, the museum's director and curator of the current exhibition explained his plans to expand the museum's sphere of interest in order "to fill empty areas in the historical memory so as to be able to correspond to a European standard" (Sniegón, 2008). The EU did not exert any pressure to do so since Slovakia in that period was considered to be catching up surprisingly quickly after the international isolation under Vladimír Mečiar in the 1990s. The Slovak government—and thus also the state museums—rather has internalized the norms since the country was looking to "become European". Roma victims are present in the outer commemorative part between the two halves of the museum (see Figure 1) and in the 1000-"pages" of information on the TV screens all around the exhibition. In the exhibition itself, Roma are not mentioned, but might be subsumed under the term "racially persecuted people" on the panel that deals with the "unification of antifascist forces" before the Uprising. Eight "pages" of the info-screen material deal with Roma under the title "Persecution and repressions against Romany population": "From autumn 1942 to autumn 1944 the Roma question in Slovakia was solved in form of labour camps for antisocial and difficult to adapt people. Over 5000 Roma were in the camps. In November 1944 the labour camp in Dubnica nad Váhom was transformed into a detainment camp, where whole Roma families were concentrated. It was reckoned that they would be deported into some sort of the [sic] concentration camps but because of a typhoid fever epidemic, the deportations did not take place." Like the "solution of the Jewish question", the term solution of the "Roma question" is used in the first sentence without ever being questioned or put in inverted commas, and Nazi argumentation is reproduced when using the terms "antisocial" and "difficult to adapt people".





**Figure 1.** Roma memorial at the Museum of Slovak National Uprising (2006), Banská Bystrica.

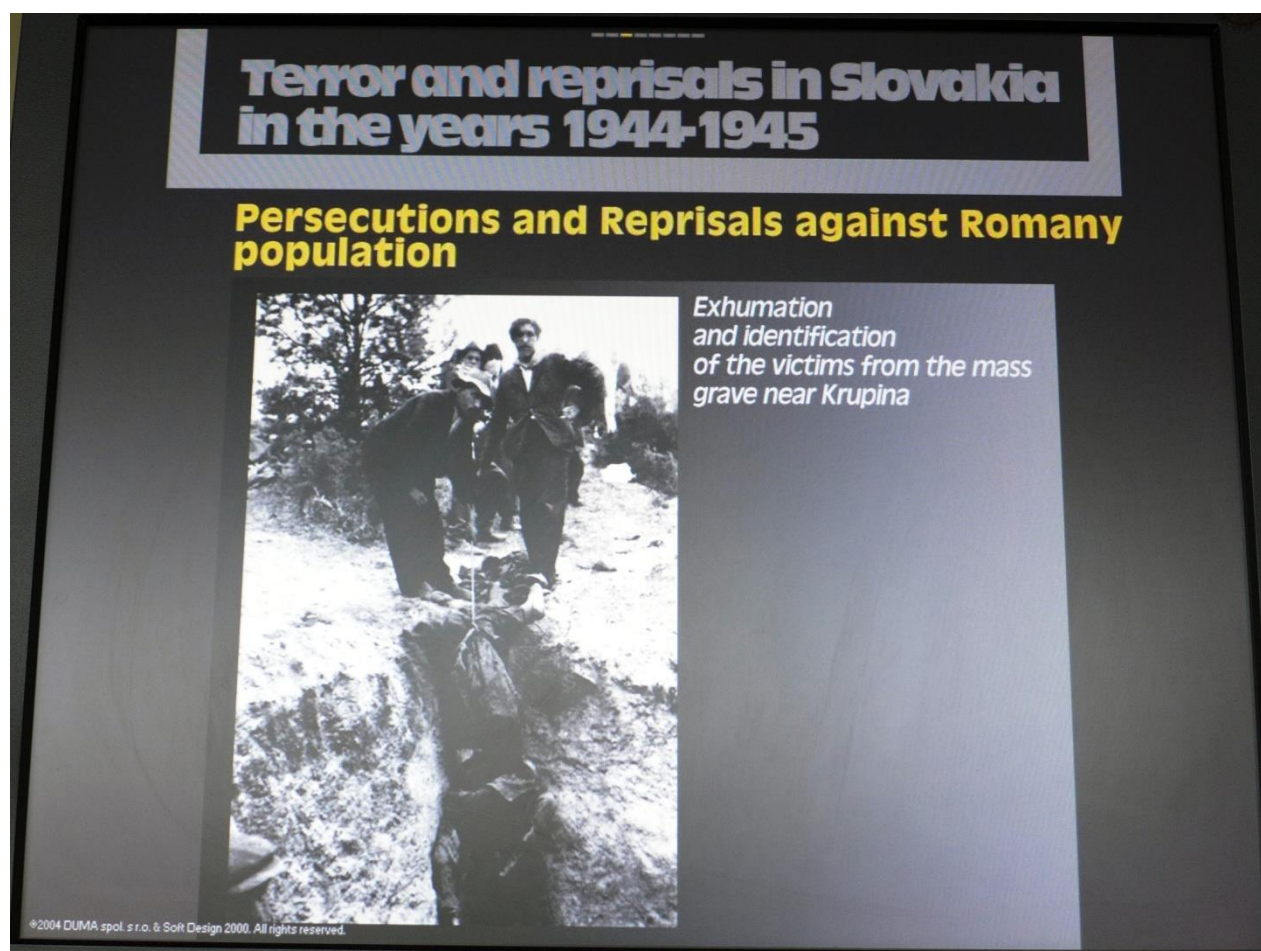
For the first time, however, the museum also provides detailed information about Roma victims and their not only German, but also Slovak perpetrators on the first page of the Roma section on the info-screens:

“On October 6th 1944 the Nazis shot dead 13 Roma in Valašská Belá. 24 Roma from the settlement Vel’ká pri Žiari nad Hronom were burnt on October 17th 1944. In Dolný Turček the Nazis executed 46 Roma from the settlement Lutilla....On November 15th 1944 in the settlement of Vydrovo they burnt alive Roma women and children, men from the village of Jergov were shot dead. At Kremnička and Nemecká the Nazis and members of POHG [*Pohotovostných oddielov Hlinkovej gardy*—special units of the Hlinka guard] shot dead 82 Roma on November 17th and 21st 1944. In December 1944 they arrested 19 Roma from Dúbravy and Detva and executed them in the Jewish cemetery in Zvolen. In the village of Slatina the Nazis burnt alive 59 inhabitants of the Roma settlement on December 23rd 1944. Other victims from among the Roma population were found in mass graves near Krupina and at Kremnička.”

There is no mention of Roma taking part in the Uprising, but since the overall title of the chapter “Terror

and reprisals in Slovakia in the years 1944–1945” is displayed above every “page”, the murders are at least somehow contextualized. A map of “detainment camps for the Roma population” in Slovakia follows as well as an unsettling photograph of the “exhumation and identification of the victims from the mass grave near Krupina”. It shows two men, presumably Roma, pulling a dead man that is hanging upside down out of a crevice after they have tied a rope around his thigh (see Figure 2). Another text screen informs about 14 Roma men who were shot at the small town of Tisovec followed by two photographs showing the “exhumation and identification of the murdered Roma Pod Hradovou [a part of the town]”—corpses first scattered in the mud and then strung together on timber planks. Two completely different photographs show portraits of Jozef and Jakub Eremiaš, two young Roma murdered at Kremnička on November 20th 1944.

The initiative *Ma bisteren!* (“Do not forget!” in Romanes), in which the museum participates, inaugurated a memorial (see Figure 1) in the outer, commemorative area of the museum on August 2nd 2005, anniversary of the day the Roma camp was liquidated in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The unveiling of the memorial was followed by a temporary exhibition on the persecution of Roma (Husova, 2006, p. 3; Mannová, 2011, p. 233).



**Figure 2.** Photograph shown on an info-screen at the Museum of Slovak National Uprising (2006).

Since 2005, the “Roma Holocaust” is commemorated every year on the 2nd of August. The commemoration is organized by the Slovak National Museum, the Milana Šimečka foundation and the SNU Museum. However, the speeches at these commemorations give evidence of exclusion and justification mechanisms and show that knowledge about the Roma genocide remains poor. The museum historian Stanislav Mičev tried to explain the low awareness of the “Roma Holocaust” by the fact that “Roma in Slovakia did not suffer a fate as cruel as the Jewish population. They were confronted primarily with administrative restrictions of their living conditions and human rights” (SITA, 2009). Furthermore, when representatives of 32 nations attached a ribbon on the “Wreath of nations” on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Uprising, Roma representatives were not allowed to do the same. They protested arguing that Roma had also given their lives for Slovakia during the Uprising and had been deported to Auschwitz (SITA, 2004). To sum up, Roma play a role at the Museum of the SNU for the first time since the 1960s, but only in the commemorative part and on the info-screens. The museum dedicated to a historic event, the Uprising, does not feel obliged to represent Roma insurgents and the repressions against them in a visible spot, but when it does portray Roma, they appear

in the context of “antisocial and difficult to adapt people”. When it comes to the visual representation, Roma are shown both in an individualized and degrading way—on two portraits and hanging upside down in a crevice.

#### 4. Jasenovac Memorial Museum

The mass murder committed by the Ustaša was a rare example of a collaborationist regime that had operated its own death camps beside the Third Reich. The biggest, Jasenovac, was a forced labor and death camp complex, where up to 100,000 people were killed (Holocaust Encyclopedia, 2014).<sup>5</sup> There was no memorial until in 1966 because in Tito’s Yugoslavia, Jasenovac was an ambivalent *lieu de mémoire*, since it was taboo to assert that only Croat Ustaša had committed crimes there, while Serbs, Roma, and Jews were the largest victim groups. Once the memorial area was established, Jasenovac became a central site of memory for victims “of all Yugoslav nations”, a site with tourist infrastructure, souvenirs, and other forms of kitsch (Sundhaussen, 2004, p. 400). Consequently, the first,

<sup>5</sup> For the discussion of the decade-long manipulations when it comes to the number of victims see Radonić (2010, pp. 95; 112-113, 122, 160).



short Jasenovac brochure from 1966 vaguely depicts the victims as “our men, women, children and elderly” (Babić, 1966). The publication from 1974 again does not explain who the victims were and why they were interned in the camp complex—with one exception. Interestingly, the only group obviously not considered as part of the tabooed civil war memory and thus explicitly mentioned are the “Gypsies–Roma” (Trivunčić, 1974, p. 28), the first ones to be interned in the “Gypsy camp” Uštica. We learn that this part of the Jasenovac camp complex was founded in the first half of 1942, that people were liquidated with blunt objects and knives and later burned. In the guide book from 1981, different ethnic groups are named. Roma are mentioned twice, first when introducing the racist policy of the Ustaša who “wanted to annihilate all Serbs, Jews and Gypsies” (Jokić, 1981, p. 5). The second “fact” mentioned in the guide is that approximately 40,000 “Roma–Gypsies” were killed after being brought to Jasenovac from the whole territory of the Ustaša state, the “Independent State of Croatia” (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*—NDH). This number of victims is too high and corresponds with the manipulation of the numbers in Tito’s Yugoslavia, where 700,000 was the codified, mythological number of victims for Jasenovac (Sundhaussen, 2004, p. 399). Today 83,145 victims have been identified by name, 16,173 of them Roma, of which 5,608 were children, 5,688 men and 4,877 women. Roma were the second largest victim group in Jasenovac (List of individual victims). The number of victims is still difficult to identify since the mass graves at Uštica, only a few kilometers away from the museum, were never unearthed and are situated at a memorial site—the “Roma graveyard” as inscribed in Croatian and Romany—almost literally in the courtyard of a Serb family that was expelled from their home in 1942 (see Figure 3).

While developing the current exhibition from 2006, the director stressed that “we want to be part of the modern European education and museum system and follow the framework we get from the institutions dealing with these topics” (Tenžera, 2004). It had been conceptualized together with international experts in order to be “internationally recognizable and in the context of international standards” (*Vjesnik*, 2004). The exhibition follows the trend to individualize the victims. The names of Roma victims are inscribed among the others on the glass plates hovering above the heads of the visitors in the exhibition and the Roma victims are always mentioned alongside the others. The panel on the legal legitimization of crimes reads: “By the legal provisions on racial affiliation Jews and Roma (Gypsies) were stripped of their rights and subjected to various forms of persecution and seizure of their property.” The text panel on deportations informs us that “Jews, Roma and Serbs were deported *en masse* from the whole territory of the NDH.” The panel which depicts Jasenovac as a death camp explicates: “Serbs, Jews and

Roma were murdered with no verdict since they did not fit into the proclaimed Ustaša concept of racial and national purity.” There is one map in the exhibition, on which Uštica is marked, but there is no explanation why it mentioned there or what it was; it is not even said that it was a “Gypsy camp”. A central element of the exhibition are 16 video testimonies of survivors, one of them being Nadir Dedić who was arrested as a minor in the Bosnian part of the NDH in the fall of 1942, but not first of all because he belonged to the Roma community, but because he was blamed for setting a blaze as a signal for partisans.



**Figure 3.** Memorial at the site of the former “Gypsy camp” Uštica, part of the Jasenovac Memorial Site, Croatia.

There are several computer working stations throughout the exhibition. There and on the museum’s website the victim groups are introduced. About the Roma we learn that mass arrests began in May 1942. “In July 1942, when the number of Roma arriving in the camp was at its highest, they were separated into two groups. The older men, women and children were separated from the younger men and immediately sent to be liquidated in Donja Gradina. The younger men were accommodated in Camp III C, set up in the open on the site of Camp III (Brickworks). Many died of hunger, dehydration, exhaustion and physical abuse. Some Roma were housed in the so-called Gypsy Camp in the village of Uštica, in the abandoned houses of murdered Serbian families....Almost no Roma who entered the camp,

regardless of age or gender, survived" (Roma in Jasenovac Concentration Camp, n.d.). The text is followed by links to two photographs, one showing Roma women and children, some barefoot and some sitting on the ground in front of a house titled "Uštica—House of Loud Weeping, the place where Roma (women and children) were housed during 1942". The other one shows an old woman with missing teeth wearing a scarf and a taller man, both being pressed against a barbed wire fence. In contrast to the other groups, there are no private photographs of Roma from before (or after) the war, only photographs taken by perpetrators.

The current museum's publication consists of chapters on the "Independent State of Croatia", the concentration camp and the destinies of each victim group written by a renowned expert. The second largest victim group, the Roma, is only mentioned once outside of the chapter dedicated to them, solely stating that "the Roma were virtually eliminated" (Jakovina, 2006, p. 30). Lengel-Krizman, the author of the Roma chapter, writes of the "forgotten holocaust" of Roma (2006, p. 159) as opposed to "a wave of repulsion and revolt" against the mass extermination of Jews—"although, it must be admitted, their numbers were much greater than those of the Roma" (p. 155). Victims' hierarchies reappear at the end of the chapter: "It is certain that in comparison to the other inmates, the Roma had the worst time of it in the camp. Although they were used to persecution, the world of the concentration camp, in which hatred and evil ruled, was completely foreign to them. For a 'people of freedom and unlimited movement' the barbed wire of the camp was unthinkable" (p. 170). We learn that "immediately after the declaration of the NDH, the Ustasha terrorist regime targeted Jews, Serbs and Croatian Communists and anti-Fascists, while the Roma were left alone until the spring of 1942, when they were slaughtered within a period of two to three months" (p. 162). The question of resistance is raised only once: "After about ten days in these conditions, most of the inmates were so physically and mentally debilitated that they had no thoughts of organised resistance" (p. 164).

This chapter differs from the others significantly since it addresses questions like Romany grammar or where the name Roma comes from—while the chapters on the other victim groups do not give such exoticizing background information. Only four out of twelve text pages of the chapter are devoted to the Roma in the NDH. We learn clichés about "the nomadic Roma": "In time they learned the value of gold....Money comes and goes and is subject to change. Their experience of wandering through various countries taught them this golden wisdom" (p. 157) Lengel-Krizman also raises the "fact" that "their women are still known for their colorful style of dressing" (p. 158). Since she authored the first monograph on the Roma genocide in Jasenovac (Lengel-Krizman, 2003), which she also sums up insight-

fully in the chapter, one may assume that those "outliers" can be explained by some kind of weird pedagogical idea that ended up very close to racist cliché. In contrast to her book (2003, p. 37), here she does not mention the unique fact that Muslim Roma in the NDH basically avoided deportations due to severe protests of Bosnian Muslim religious leaders "whom the regime courted from the outset" (Biondich, 2002, p. 37) against the repression. Furthermore, while the texts on Serb and Jewish victims (written by a Serb and a Jew) include plenty of testimonies, there are none from Roma here, since—as the author argues in a shocking way—"the witness statements of the few survivors are so shocking that we may, although we are not bound to, accept them as trustworthy and authentic", so she does not accept them (Lengel-Krizman, 2006, p. 170). There is one paragraph that depicts a specific event in an empathetic way, and it deals with Roma musicians playing "the terribly moving concert which the Roma put on for their own people and the other inmates...at a time when the murder of their fellows was reaching its culmination. There were just a few terrified groups of Roma left in the camp, among them a singing group and some musicians....The next day they were led away to Gradina and killed, though the sound of their singing echoed in the ears of the remaining Jasenovac prisoners for a long time, like a funeral march for all the victims of the 'mindless Ustasha terror'" (p. 166).

The publication contains 221 photographs, most of them portraits of victims, pictures of them before the war and from inside the camp. Yet, Roma are the only ones who are represented with only four pictures, all of them solely from inside the camp, none from their lives before. The fact that there is only one video testimony from a Roma can be explained by the fact that hardly any Roma survived Jasenovac. But there is not a single visual representation of this group that was not produced by a perpetrator, while there are numerous portraits of Jewish, Serb and Croat victims from their life before. Also, in the museum's publication, the Roma are the only ones not allowed to speak for themselves since the author of the chapter is a non-Rom who declares "their" testimonies to be not "trustworthy", while this is the core element of the other texts. Obviously, the fact that the museum is *in situ*, at the site where over 16,000 Roma were killed, today obliges the museum to address their story, but with far less empathy than what is shown for other victim groups.

## 5. Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest

The *Holocaust Memorial Center* (HMC) in Budapest opened a few weeks before Hungary joined the EU, although the permanent exhibition was only ready two years later. This can be understood as an answer to the severe critique of the nationalist-revisionist museum *House of Terror*, which Victor Orbán opened during his



election campaign in 2002 (Crete, 2013). The aesthetics of the dark exhibition rooms reminds us of the *US Holocaust Memorial Museum* in Washington, D.C., and the *Jasenovac Memorial Museum*. The recent trend to focus on the individualized victim (Köhr, 2013, p. 74) is clearly visible at the exhibition, while at the same time the responsibility of Hungarian politicians, administration, gendarmes and population is displayed without restraints.

The exhibition is dedicated to the Jewish and Roma victims. Yet the sections focusing on Roma were not developed by the main curators' team, but by another group led by Péter Szuhay from the *Museum of Ethnography* in Budapest. The initial plan did not include the Roma victims and was changed due to an intervention of Roma activists (Kovács, Lénárt, & Szász, 2014). One element of the individualization of the victims are the stories of five families, four Jewish and one Roma, from Nagybecsérd in Baranya county. Together with the Jewish families, the story of István Kolompár's family accompanies the visitors from room to room. We learn that his daughter Aranka survived while many others including her eighteen-month-old sister Ilona did not.<sup>6</sup> Of the three exhibitions, this one has the most visible representation of Roma, starting off with six photographs and referring to Roma on numerous text panels.

Hungarian Jews and Roma are introduced in the first room (see Figure 4), showing Roma "working, countering a common prejudice that perceives Roma as work-shy or criminal" (Meyer, 2014, p. 185). Three of the photographs show Roma at work: making bricks, a coppersmith carrying pots, tub maker artisans and a band leader and his son

playing violin. The last photo shows a family of boilermakers in front of a tent. The first photo displays the subtitle "Roma women wandering and begging somewhere in Hungary, 1910s" and portrays a self-confident woman smoking a pipe, and behind her, among others, there is a girl wearing only a long shirt and walking barefoot on a dusty road. This combines the depiction of poverty, wilderness and a sexual element represented in the challenging look of the smoking woman—the pipe typically being attributed to a fortune teller (Baumgartner & Kovács, 2007, p. 21). While the location where all the photographs of Jews were taken is indicated, even giving the name of the street or the square, three of the six photographs of Roma are situated in an unknown place "somewhere in Hungary". There is a long tradition of depicting Roma as standing outside the civil society (Holzer, 2008, p. 48), outside of towns, markets and villages. They are often shown wandering around in anonymous landscapes without a clear regional reference point (Baumgartner & Kovács, 2007, p. 19). The first panel on "the Roma in Hungary" says:

"By the end of the nineteenth century, most of the Gypsies in Hungary had settled down and spoke Hungarian. They lived on the peripheries of cities and villages under extremely poor conditions. From spring to autumn they were occupied in agriculture; thousands worked as travelling artisans, and were welcome in villages and towns. Many Gypsy musicians were famous nationwide, indeed all over Europe. As artists, they were held in high esteem and rewarded handsomely. Those vagrant Gypsies who kept to their traditional way of life were subject to often forced efforts by authorities to be settled and integrated into Hungarian society."

6 For an overview of the historical events see Bársony & Daróczi (2008) and Karsai (2005).



Figure 4. The Roma section in the introductory room of the Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest.

What the text probably hints at is Hungary's pronounced assimilationist policy, but since this part comes directly after the one covering "The Jews in Hungary", it is the differences between the two that stand out. Meyer argues that "unlike in the introduction of the Jews in the first section, the Roma are not given a voice of their own; nothing is said about how they saw themselves in relation to the Hungarian nation or their own cultural practices....Most evidently in the example of the musicians, the jobs taken by Roma are presented as inherent qualities of the Roma rather than an effect of historical developments" (Meyer, 2014, p. 183). The distinction between settled and vagrant Gypsies becomes even more central as the narrative continues. While the high grade of assimilation is stressed when it comes to Jews, Roma are depicted as "the others", although some were "welcome". There is a strict distinction between "Gypsy musicians" "held in high esteem" and "vagrant Gypsies". Again, here we find a stereotype description of Roma who "clung to their nomadic way of life and permanently lived in tribal, clannish circumstances". "It was these people that the authorities kept trying to settle or drive to the territory of neighboring countries." Such a distanced and even depreciative phrase as "these people" or the statement that "the job of the authorities was not made easier by the fact that the law never defined who was to be regarded as a Gypsy" seems impossible in connection with the representation of Jewish victims.

While the photos of Roma are prominent in the first, introductory room, they are scarce in the rest of the exhibition and in the guide book. The latter includes more than 50 photographs of Jewish victims, but only two of Roma and one of a Dutch Sinti girl. Furthermore, the artifacts in the introductory room can be associated with "Jewish" professions and Judaism, whereas there are no objects of Roma. When it comes to video testimonies on the multimedia stations, the testimonies of four Roma women have the caption "Persecution of Roma" without giving the names of the survivors as is the case with testimonies of Jews (Meyer, 2014, p. 194). There is one longer section dealing with tangible fates of Roma in connection with the culmination of persecution in Hungary at the Komárom fortress:

"In Hungary, in autumn 1944, many Roma children and the old and sick froze to death in the open air or died of hunger and thirst in the collecting camp at Komárom. A great number of Roma children and old people released from the Komárom fortress died due to the ordeals they had gone through on their way home....The brutality of the guards, the lack of food, and various diseases caused the death of large numbers of Hungarian Gypsies. Hundreds of them were shot into mass graves by Arrow Cross thugs and gendarmes at Szolgaegyháza, Várpalota, Lajoskomárom, Nagyszalonta, Lengyel and other places."

In contrast to the visual elements, the text is very precise about locations. Still, after the introductory room, the parts on Roma victims appear to have been added afterwards. In fact, there was far less information about Roma in the original concept, but a public debate in summer 2004 led to the recommendation to either extend this part or to completely skip it (Molnár, 2012). At the end of long paragraphs on Jewish victims Roma are often mentioned in two sentences, saying that Roma were "also" humiliated: "the racist Nuremberg Laws of 1935 covered Gypsies *as well*"; "Roma *also* fell victim to pseudo-medical experiments". This peaks in the statement that "in the concentration camps death harvested among Roma *as well*....Gypsies died by the thousand in that camp, *too*" (p. 52). In other cases, the fates of Roma are displayed in self-contained panels and chapters of the exhibition's guidebook. The chapter on "Life' in Auschwitz" deals only with Jewish inmates, while the "massacres on Roma" are covered later. Only there do we learn how closely connected the fates of both victim groups were: The Roma camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau was supposed to be liquidated in preparation for the mass deportations of Hungarian Jews on the first day of their arrival, but the Roma resisted—yet were still murdered later, on 2 August 1944. Visitors are informed that in Poland "settled Roma were sent to Jewish ghettos" (p. 52) and later murdered "along with Jews from Warsaw" in Treblinka. In rare cases, the suffering of the Jewish and Roma victims is parallelized in a way that evokes empathy with both groups: "Roma imprisoned in Komárom, which functioned as the largest collecting camp, had to undergo ordeals very much like those suffered by the Jewish victims of the summer deportations: their provision was poor, they often had no latrines at all, and their captors beat them" (p. 34) or "EINSATZGRUPPEN following the advancing German army in Soviet territory often massacred Gypsies along with Jews" (p. 52). The comparison gets especially interesting when dealing with the effort to introduce forced military labor for Roma: "The organization of the Gypsy forced military labour companies was rendered difficult by the fact that unlike Jews, Gypsies did not enroll obediently, and if they were captured and pressed into service, they escaped at the first opportunity" (p. 33). This is the only sentence in the three museums in which resistance of Roma is explicitly addressed, and this is done in connection with the troublesome discourse on the passivity of Jewish victims.

This museum is also the only one that deals with "anti-Gypsy views", although not as remarkably comprehensively as it does with anti-Semitism. Regarding the treatment of Roma in the interwar period it says: "It was always up to the good- or ill-will of the local authorities...when and how their settlements were inspected, or liquidated, as the case might be. Under the pretext of disinfecting, delousing Gypsy settlements,

the authorities sometimes acted with brutal force, making sure that Roma men and women were shorn of their hair, including body hair. The occasionally bitterly anti-Gypsy views and suggestions of low-level public officials and local civilians were usually not supported by competent authorities in the Ministry of the Interior" (p. 33). Although the pronounced assimilationist policy is not discussed in the context of Central European interwar developments here, it is yet only in this exhibition that the fates of Roma throughout Europe are mentioned—in Germany (which is also the case in the Jasenovac publication), Eastern Prussia, Burgenland in Austria, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Crimea, Serbia, France and Belgium (p. 34).

## 6. Conclusions

The fact that newer post-communist memorial museums have included Roma in their exhibitions for the first time is clearly connected to the museums' assertion that they fulfill "European standards" and must be seen in the context of EU accession, the "universalization of the Holocaust" and the Roma genocide becoming a European agenda. Having analyzed ten post-communist museums from the Baltics to former Yugoslavia, I can say that those three museums whose aesthetics and rhetoric allude to international archetypes in the strongest way are also the ones to have included the Roma into their exhibitions most extensively in my sample. In the exhibitions, we learn about humiliations like the shaving of body hair and forced military labor service even before World War II; about deportations, hunger, freezing to death and mass liquidations, sometimes even before entering the respective Nazi or Ustaša camp; about music as a way to face the horrors of a death camp and sometimes lethal, sometimes successful resistance of Roma—in the Slovak National Uprising, Hungary and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Still, it became clear that there is a hierarchy of victims' representation in all three exhibitions, no matter what the specific topic of the museum is: The Roma are marginalized the most at the museum that deals with the Uprising—in which "our", Slovak victims come first—, while they are represented prominently in the Croatian museum at the site of a concentration camp and in the exhibition that deals with genocide on Jews and Roma in an entire country: Hungary. In the Slovak case, textual representations of Roma are restricted to the commemorative area and portrayed in just a few pages of the overwhelmingly extensive info-screens. They are mentioned alongside the other victim groups on the prominent text panels in the Croatian case, but we learn only little about the precise historical context and the reasons of the persecution (or non-persecution as in the case of Muslim Roma from Bosnia), and Roma victims are not allowed to speak for themselves. Or, like in the Hungarian case, they appear to be added to

the exhibition texts *ex post*, stating over and over again that Roma had "also" suffered and were humiliated, "too"—the mistreatment of Jews becoming the standard that all suffering was compared to.

When it comes to visual representations of Roma, the Slovak case is the most striking one since it provides both the only two private pre-war photographs of two Roma brothers which allow empathy with the individual victim—and the most humiliating image of a corpse hanging upside down in a ditch during an "exhumation", thus documenting a haphazard selection. In contrast to that, the case is quite clear in the Jasenovac publication. The individual victim is emphasized over and over again in most chapters and most of the images are private photographs from the life "before" or "after", but there are *no* such images of Roma. In the case of the Hungarian publication, the lack of private photographs is also striking, but there is one image of Aranka's family, one of the five families shown on the video screens. If group photographs are shown at the exhibitions, the similarities are striking since most protagonists sit on the ground, walk barefooted and only partially vested on a dusty road "somewhere" in the country, as opposed to precisely located pictures of Jews.

The Roma are completely absent when it comes to artifacts. This is quite a contrast to ethnographical museums like the permanent exhibition titled "Gypsy history and culture in Poland within the framework of their European history" at the branch of the Ethnographical museum in the southern Polish town of Tarnów, where objects like music instruments, harnesses for horses or scarves dominate the scenery (Bartos, 2007). So there seems to be no lack of artifacts connected to the history of Roma. The question is whether there is enough information about the former owners in order to tell their story in a way that strengthens the individualization of Roma victims and does not reproduce ethnographical clichés. In any case, the fact that there are *no* artifacts that can be attributed to Roma in the three museums shows how marginalized they are in the hierarchy of victims' representation.

There might be good reasons why it is more difficult to provide individualizing elements when it comes to the representation of Roma compared to that of Jews, first of all due to the scarcity of testimonies and sources, but there is no reason to address Roma as "people of freedom and unlimited travel". Also, although the historical and current situation in the three countries analyzed here differs significantly, the similarities show that when it comes to *how* Roma are depicted, stereotypes dominate the representation in a much stronger manner than the national context. But it depends strongly on national discourses and the EU accession process *if* a state memorial museum includes the persecution of Roma into its permanent exhibition in the first place. The only exhibition that mentions Roma resistance, paints a Europe-wide picture of their



persecution, and addresses anti-Gypsism in the society, appears to be an anachronism in today's Hungary: The memorial for the victims of the German occupation and the "House of Fates", a new Fidesz Holocaust museum that is planned to deal with the children among the Holocaust victims and the Hungarian rescuers (but not with Roma or Hungarian perpetrators before the Arrow Cross rule in late 1944), demonstrate how marginalized the self-critical, Europe-oriented *Holocaust Memorial Center* has become. While this institution used to set a counterpoint to the nationalist *House of Terror*, which makes no mention of Roma, Orbán's Hungary today sees no need to broach the issue of their persecution in new museums any more. For half a decade, aggressive anti-Gypsism has gone hand in hand with historical revisionism and the successive abolishment of democratic checks and balances. Just like in 1968 and during the following repressions called "normalization", there is obviously still a close connection between confronting the past in a self-critical way and liberalization on the one hand as opposed to denial and authoritarianism on the other hand.

### Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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